

# The News Journal

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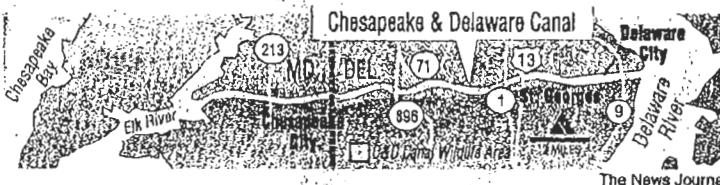
## Army Corps to study recreation along C&D canal

### Park areas suggested, but hunting will stay

By SEAN O'SULLIVAN  
The News Journal

Delaware residents often refer to themselves as either being from above the canal, meaning the more urban and suburban areas to the north, or as from below the canal, meaning the more rural areas to the south.

Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del., hopes to bridge the divide created by the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal by turning the areas around the waterway into a park to provide a common



recreation space for people on both sides.

"Turn a negative into a positive," Castle said.

On Thursday, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced it will launch a \$150,000 study to look at ways to improve the recreational opportunities along the more than 9,000 acres of government-owned land on either side of the 14-mile

canal. The study would be paid for by a mix of federal and local money.

Castle, who asked the corps to take up the study, said the area is not being used to its potential.

"All you have to do is see it and look at it," said Castle, standing on the deck of the Delafort, the boat on which officials were given a short tour of the canal.

By adding some signs, parking

lots, benches, bathrooms and paving a few trails for biking and walking, Castle feels the recreational use of the area would increase tenfold while still maintaining its natural character.

Recreational boats are a common sight on the canal, and state officials said the area is one of the most popular hunting spots in the state. More than 1,100 hunters pursue deer, quail and ducks in the area every season, said Rob Hossler, of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

Castle and state officials said these hunting areas would be retained as part of the park plan, and could exist side-by-side with recre-

See CANAL — B5

## Canal: Nearby towns hope for economic boost

FROM PAGE B1

ational areas as they do in other state parks.

John J. Thompson, president of the Delaware State Sportsmen's Association said he had not heard about the park plan before Thursday and did not yet have an opinion on it.

New Castle County Executive Tom Gordon said the area below the canal is one of the fastest growing in the county and those residents will need recreation areas. Tim Plemons of Delaware Greenways and DNREC Secretary John Hughes also supported the idea.

Castle is running for re-election this year. His Democratic opponent, Paul Donnelly, praised the canal park idea and said he would support moving forward with it if elected.

Delaware City shop owners and residents hope expanding the recreational opportunities will bring more tourists to town.

"I think it would be wonderful," said Chris Crain of the Delaware City Coffee Company.

Castle said there also could be an east-west benefit, linking Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland with a federally operated park. The corps study will include federal lands on the Maryland side of the canal and Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, R-Md., strongly supports Castle's plan.

### ONLINE POLL

Should the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal area be turned into a park?

Submit your answer at [www.delawareonline.com](http://www.delawareonline.com).

Patricia Garrett, the town manager of Chesapeake City, Md., said local and state officials attempted a similar effort several years ago, "but nothing really came of it."

Garrett said a park would be welcomed by Chesapeake City, particularly if it led to a better police presence along the roads and paths beside the canal.

Lt. Col. Robert J. Ruch, commander and district engineer of the corps' Philadelphia district, said the corps operates recreational areas in other parts of the nation and could possibly operate one here in Delaware.

Delaware is the only state in the union without a national park. While the planned C&D Canal Park is not expected to be a part of the national park system, federal money could help run it because of corps involvement.

Ruch said operation of the park, if one is created, would likely be shared between the corps and local government.

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Aboard the Delafort, Rep. Mike Castle (right) talks to DNREC's Rob Hossler about improving the federal land along the canal.

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